

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L DACCA 4819

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TAGS: PFOR, PGOV, BG, IN

SUBJ: BANGLADESH FOREIGN SECRETARY ON FARAKKA DISPUTE

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1. SUMMARY. FOREIGN SECRETARY TABARAK HUSAIN CALLED ME IN TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, FOR A PERSONAL EXCHANGE OF VIEWS ON HOW HE MIGHT PROCEED ON THE FARAKKA ISSUE. HE SAID THE USG WAS REGARDED AS A GOOD FRIEND OF BD AND HE NEEDED TO FIND A RECOMMENDATION TO THE GOVERNMENT WHICH WOULD GET THEM OFF THEIR PRESENT QUOTE COLLISION COURSE END QUOTE. HE SAID THAT GIVEN THE FAILURE OF THE LAST ROUND OF GOI-BDG TALKS, THEY MUST PROCEED AT LEAST WITH THE INSCRIPTION OF THEIR ITEM ON THE UNGA AGENDA SO AS NOT TO APPEAR TO BE BACKING DOWN BUT HE DID NOT SHARE THE VIEW OF OTHERS IN THE GOVERNMENT THAT LOBBYING AND DEBATING THE ISSUE AT THE UN WOULD HELP ITS RESOLUTION. HE WAS SEARCHING FOR AN ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURE TO RESUME ESSENTIALLY BILATERAL TALKS, POSSIBLY WITH THE GOOD OFFICES OF A MUTUALLY RESPECTED THIRD GOVERNMENT. HE DID NOT EXPECT THE USG TO PLAY THAT ROLE. END SUMMARY.

2. REVIEWING THE LATEST ROUND OF TALKS, FOREIGN SECRETARY SAID THEY WERE A GREAT DISAPPOINTMENT. THE GOI HAD
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OFFERED A TEN-POINT PROPOSAL WHICH INCLUDED ADDITIONAL TIME CONSUMING STUDIES AND THE LINK CANAL. THE BDG HAD REPLIED WITH A FIVE-POINT PROPOSAL RANGING FROM MONTHLY WATER SHARING TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF STORAGE DAMS. THEY WERE NOW STALEMATED WITH BOTH SIDES LINKING SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS. HE REITERATED THE FAMILIAR COMPLAINTS OF BDG ABOUT THE SOCIAL-ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF INIA'S WITHDRAWAL OF WATER FROM THE GANGES DURING THE LEAN SEASON, POINTS AGAIN ELABORATED IN THE WHITE PAPER RELEASED YESTERDAY AND REPORTED SEPTEL.

3. HE READ PORTIONS OF A REPORT RECENTLY PREPARED, BUT NOT PUBLICIZED, ON THIS ISSUE BY HARVARD LAW PROFESSOR RICHARD BAXTER WHICH, ACCORDING TO TABARAK, ARGUED THAT ON BALANCE BDG HAD THE MORE LEGITIMATE GRIEVANCES AND THE GOI WAS IN VIOLATION OF PREVIOUS AGREEMENTS.

4. DESCRIBING THEIR EFFORTS TO FIND INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT AT COLOMBO, BY LOBBYING RATHER THAN BY TAKING THE ISSUE TO THE FLOOR, THE FOREIGN SECRETARY SAID THEY HAD SPOKEN WITH TITO, SADAT, MRS. BANDARANAIKE, QADHAFI, AMONG OTHERS, AND HAD ELICITED BOTH STATEMENTS OF SYMPATHY AND HINTS THAT THESE LEADERS MIGHT RAISE THE ISSUE WITH MRS. GANDHI. HE WAS NOT, HOWEVER, OPTIMISTIC. NOW OTHERS IN THE BDG FELT MORE STRONGLY THAN EVER THAT IT NEEDED TO BE TAKEN TO THE UN IN THEIR SEARCH FOR A SOLUTION.

5. HE REGRETTED THAT BDG-GOI RELATIONS WERE BECOMING EVEN MORE STRAINED BY CONCURRENT PRESS ACCOUNTS OF ALLEGED INDIA COLLUSION ON BORDER TROUBLES, INSISTING THAT THESE ISSUES WERE TO BE SEEN AS CONCURRENT RATHER THAN CONNECTED. HE SAID THE MILITARY LEADERS IN THE BDG WERE HIGHLY UPSET ABOUT THE BORDER ISSUES AND WOULD NOT AGREE TO ANY PROPOSAL TO SUPPRESS THIS NEWS IN THE INTERESTS OF COOLING OFF BILATERAL RELATIONS. ALTHOUGH INSISTING THAT THEIR REPORTS WERE CORRECT AND TOO MANY PEOPLE WERE BEING KILLED, INJURED OR OTHERWISE VICTIMIZED, TABARAK WAS DISTURBED THAT ADMIRAL KHAN HAD EVEN RAISED THIS MATTER IN THE LATEST DELHI TALKS BOTH WITH MRS. GANDHI AND HER ADVISORS ON FARAKKA.

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6. ASKING MY PERSONAL VIEWS ON HOW THEY MIGHT PROCEED, I SAID IT WAS NOT FOR ME TO OFFER SPECIFIC ADVICE BEYOND REITERATING THE USG VIEW THAT THE BILATERAL RATHER THAN INTERNATIONAL APPROACH WOULD FOR ALL THE OBVIOUS REASONS BE THE ONLY ONE PROMISING AN EARLY OR PRACTICAL SOLUTION. IN MORE GENERAL TERMS, HOWEVER, I SAID I WAS STRUCK BY THE FACT THAT THERE SEEMED TO BE SO MUCH TALK ON BOTH SIDES ABOUT SO-CALLED PERMANENT,

LONG-TERM, EXPENSIVE IF NOT IRRECONCILABLE SOLUTIONS. I WONDERED IF IT WAS AN OVER SIMPLIFICATION TO FIRST AND INDEPENDENTLY ADDRESS THE IMMEDIATE PROBLEM OF SHARING GANGES WATER IN THE LEAN PERIOD. ALMOST ANY SUCCESS THERE COULD PRESUMABLY RELIEVE INTERNAL ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL PRESSURES AS WELL AS REDUCE SOME OF THE HEAT IN THEIR BILATERAL RELATIONS. HE SAID THAT, WHILE THERE MIGHT BE AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPLORE THIS POSSIBILITY, THERE WAS NOT EVEN AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE PARTIES ON THE LENGTH OF THE LEAN PERIOD AND THAT THE BDG TECHNICIANS HAD BEEN ARGUING THAT SHORT AND LONG TERM AGREEMENTS WERE INSEPARABLE.

7. TABARAK SAID HE WAS THINKING ALSO OF SOLICITING THE GOOD OFFICES OF ANOTHER COUNTRY, NOT THE US, THAT MIGHT FACILITATE THE RESUMPTION OF BILATERAL TALKS SOON AFTER THE USGA CONVENES AND OBVIATE A PUBLIC DEBATE IN THAT FORUM THAT MIGHT HARDEN THE POSITIONS. HE WAS CONSIDERING IRAN IN THIS REGARD, ALTHOUGH HE HAD NOT YET EVEN RAISED THIS POSSIBILITY WITH THAT GOVERNMENT.

8. COMMENT: WE SHOULD PROTECT THE FOREIGN SECRETARY'S COMMENTS AND FRUSTRATION. AS HE SPOKE OF THEIR BEING ON A COLLISION COURSE, DOUBTING THE WISDOM OR RESULTS OF GOING TO THE UN WITH WHOSE PROCEDURES HE SHOWED NO FAMILIARITY, AND HINTING THAT THESE PRESSURES WERE COMING FROM THE MILITARY, THE CIVILIAN ADVISORS AND THE ENGINEERS IN THE BUREAUCRACY, TABARAK SEEMED VERY MUCH ALONE BOTH IN HIS OWN MINISTRY AND IN HIS OWN GOVERNMENT.
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